



## **Frequently Asked Questions Gray Wolf Delisting**

**January 14, 2009**

### **Q. When will wolves be delisted from the federal Endangered Species list?**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) recently announced that it will delist wolves in the Northern Rockies. Wolves in Montana, Idaho, eastern Oregon, eastern Washington, and a small portion of northwest Utah will be delisted. The entire state of Wyoming, however, will retain federal Endangered Species Act protections for wolves. The decision is scheduled to take effect 30 days after it is published in the Federal Register.

### **Q. Are wolves recovered in the northern Rocky Mountains?**

Yes. The USFWS concluded that the northern Rockies wolf population is recovered and can be delisted. The numeric recovery goal was set at a minimum of 30 breeding pairs and 300 wolves in the tri-state region. At the end of 2007, there were about 1,500 wolves and 107 breeding pairs.

A second aspect of the recovery goal is that the three wolf populations in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming make up a larger regional “metapopulation” where wolves have the ability to disperse and travel throughout the region to join existing packs or start new packs. This assures genetic diversity, especially given that Montana’s wolf population connects with much larger wolf populations in Canada and Alaska. Successful dispersal and mixing of wolves from different parts of the region and with wolves north of the international border assures that loss of genetic diversity will not be a problem in the future.

### **Q. Will this wolf recovery decision be challenged in federal court?**

Yes, FWP and others expect a court challenge.

### **Q. How many wolves are there in Montana and the northern Rocky Mountains?**

Montana is committed to maintaining a secure, recovered population and will manage for 400 or more wolves. At the end of 2007, a minimum of about 422 wolves inhabited Montana in 73 packs, 39 of which were classified as a breeding pair and had at least two pups survive until December 31. Preliminary estimates for 2008 suggest the population will be similar to 2007 levels. There were about 1,500 wolves in the northern Rocky Mountains at the end of 2007. Preliminary estimates for 2008 suggest the population will be similar to 2007 levels.

### **Q. Who will be responsible for managing Montana's wolves after delisting?**

FWP and the respective Indian Tribes are the lead agencies for wolf conservation and management in Montana. USDA Wildlife Services will still be responsible for investigating injured or dead livestock to determine whether wolves were responsible. Wildlife Services will also continue assisting FWP with resolving wolf-livestock conflicts through both lethal and non-lethal approaches.



**Q. What will this responsibility cost?**

FWP estimates that it will cost between \$900,000 and \$1million per year to conserve and manage wolves in Montana. No single source has been identified and Montana expects to use a combination of sources, including wolf hunting licenses sales, and other funds. FWP will continue working with the Montana Congressional delegation to maintain federal funding. National interest in conserving popular species like wolves and grizzly bears also brings with it a national responsibility to help fund their management.

**Q. Can Montana change its plan and state laws after delisting?**

Any changes to Montana's laws, administrative rules, or the state's management plan will be reviewed by the USFWS to determine if the changes will jeopardize maintenance of a recovered population. Significant changes would likely result in the federal government relisting the gray wolf under federal law.

**Q. What is the role of the federal government after delisting?**

Each state is required to annually report the population status to the USFWS for least five years. The federal agency will also examine how the each state carries out its management plan and implements its respective state laws and regulations.

**Q. What is a Status Review and what triggers it?**

A "status review" is when the USFWS evaluates the potential threats to a species long-term survival. This is done periodically while there are ongoing efforts to recover a rare or imperiled species. A status review could be triggered if the numbers of wolves and breeding pairs drops below acceptable minimum levels or if wolves are not able to disperse effectively so that the regional population is not maintaining adequate genetic diversity. The status review could also determine what corrective actions are required to reverse the declines.

**Q. Under what circumstances could wolves be relisted under the ESA?**

In general, three scenarios would lead the USFWS to initiate a status review and analysis of threats to determine if relisting was warranted, including:

- 1) if the wolf population falls below wolf population recovery levels of 100 wolves and 10 breeding pairs in either Montana, Idaho, or Wyoming.
- 2) if the wolf population segment in Montana, Idaho, or Wyoming falls below 150 wolves or 15 breeding pairs in any of the states for three consecutive years.
- 3) if a change in state law or management objectives would significantly increase the threat to the wolf population.

A federal judge or the USFWS could also relist the northern Rocky gray wolf population in response to legal challenges.

See the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service website for additional information:

<http://westerngraywolf.fws.gov>



**Q. What's going to change in Montana after delisting?**

Upon delisting, the line separating the northern Endangered Area and the southern Experimental Area will no longer exist. Montana will have one legal classification of wolves as a “species in need of management” statewide, which offers wildlife protections under state law. Under this state law, wolves could only be purposely killed legally under four conditions:

- legal hunting or trapping during an official season authorized by the FWP Commission
- if seen killing or threatening to kill (biting, wounding, harassing chasing, attacking) livestock
- to protect human life
- as authorized by FWP to address wolf-livestock conflicts

**Q. What will happen when the old federal classifications expire?**

Upon successful delisting, the federal regulations in both the northwest Montana Endangered Area and the southern Montana Experimental will no longer apply. Federal regulations will automatically be replaced by state laws, Montana administrative rules, and the federally-approved state plan.

**Q. Can landowners protect their livestock from predation?**

Under FWP administrative rules set to take effect immediately upon delisting, all Montana landowners and livestock producers will be able to non-injuriouly haze or harass a wolf, or kill a wolf that is seen actively biting, wounding, chasing, harassing, or attacking livestock or domestic dogs on both public or private land. Such incidents, however, must be reported to FWP within 72 hours. The flexibility is provided in Montana law and is in the defense of property statute that also pertains to mountain lions or black bears caught damaging private property.

**Q. How will decisions about problem wolves be made?**

When wolves are delisted state law and administrative rules will automatically replace federal regulations. FWP decisions to address wolf-livestock conflicts will be made based the state’s federally approved state plan and administrative rules adopted by the FWP Commission in 2008. The plan and administrative rules outline an incremental management approach guided by wolf numbers, the location of conflicts, depredation history of the pack, potential for additional losses, and pack size. FWP will continue to rely on USDA Wildlife Services investigations of injured or dead livestock suspected to be wolf-related.

**Q. What about a Montana’s wolf hunting or trapping season?**

The FWP Commission adopted a wolf hunting season framework for the 2008 and 2009 seasons. A trapping season was not approved for either 2008 or 2009. Legal challenges to the 2008 federal delisting decision blocked the 2008 season from taking place.



The wolf-hunting season approved by the FWP Commission is a quota-based system, which limits the total number of wolves that could be taken by hunters within three wolf management units. The season dates would follow Montana's big game rifle hunting seasons. The wolf population would be carefully monitored before, during, and after the hunting season to determine how it responds. A 2009 wolf hunting season could occur, and FWP will recommend that the FWP Commission establish a quota. Renewed legal challenges are expected and the timing of actual license sales is unknown.

**Q. What population parameters will be monitored?**

Through the year, FWP seeks to verify new wolf activity, determine if packs den, whether pups were born, and whether at least two pups survived to the end of the calendar year.

At the end of each calendar year, FWP takes a snap shot of the minimum Montana population. FWP prepares an annual report that lists the minimum total number of wolves, the number of packs of two or more wolves and the number of breeding pairs, as required by USFWS. To estimate the total minimum number of wolves, FWP adds the minimum number of wolves known in packs and minimum number of known lone individuals.

FWP has been investigating alternative methods to monitor and estimate the population with equal reliability. In the future, FWP hopes that through a variety of approaches, population monitoring will be more cost effective but equally reliable.

In addition, FWP monitors all wolves handled for routine health and disease, which yields information about overall health of the animal, old injuries or wounds, and parasites. Also, through collection of tissue samples and movement information using radio telemetry, FWP is also able to monitor wolf dispersal and genetic diversity.

**Q. What happens if delisting is delayed or postponed as a result of legal challenges?**

For as long as federal funding is made available, FWP and the respective Indian Tribes will continue as the lead agencies for wolf conservation and management in Montana. FWP would continue to carry out its federally approved plan to the extent possible, although hunting would not be possible. Gray wolves across northern Montana would still be classified as "endangered." Gray wolves across southern Montana would remain classified as "experimental." USDA Wildlife Services would still investigate to determine the cause of injured or dead livestock and would continue assisting FWP with resolving wolf-livestock conflicts through both lethal and non-lethal approaches.

***To learn more about Montana's wolf population, and to access Montana's annual wolf program reports, visit FWP online at [fwp.mt.gov](http://fwp.mt.gov). Click "Montana Wolves."***

***Web visitors can also tell FWP when they see wolves or wolf sign. The information helps to verify the activity, distribution, and pack sizes of Montana's recovered wolf population.***